Complementizers and assertive predicates: A window into their syntax and pragmatics

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Introduction: Since Hooper and Thompson (1973) – H&T henceforth, both the syntax and pragmatics of so called *assertive predicates* have been topics of much debate. H&T establish a correlation between the grammaticality of root phenomena in embedded clauses and their assertive interpretation. Crosslinguistically, this correlation has been extended to explain other types of root phenomena (e.g., V2 in Germanic languages, cf. Heycock 2006 for an overview). Drawing on data from Spanish, Asturian and English, I show that assertive predicates differ syntactically from other kinds of predicates in the left-peripheral constructions that the selected embedded clause may license. As it is shown in (1), embedded CPs selected by this class of predicates license Hanging Topics (HT), Left-Dislocated Topics (LD) and Focus constituents. Further, these predicates may also select a complement clause that doesn't exhibit any left-peripheral construction, as in (2).

Analysis: Assuming a cartographic approach to the CP (cf. Benincà and Poletto 2004), I argue that assertive predicates may select two kinds of sentential complements: they may select a sentential CP headed by either Force°, or by Finiteness° (Fin°). Extending Demonte and Fernández Soriano's (2009) analysis of the complementizer system in Spanish to English and Asturian, I contend that these languages have two homophonous *que* "that" complementizers mapped in two different heads in the left-periphery, namely *que1* "that1" mapped in Force° and *que2* "that2" in Finiteness° (Fin°), as depicted in (4). With the different positions that these complementizers may occupy in the structure in (4), the grammaticality of the different left-peripheral constructions shown in (1) can be explained as follows. If the assertive matrix predicate *dice* "he says" or *cree* "he believes" selects Force° mapped as *que1* "that1", this selection is predicted to be compatible with HT(cf. (1a)), with LD (see (1b)), and with Focalized constituents (in (1c)). In turn, if Fin° mapped as *que2* "that2" is selected, the analysis I propose predicts that this selection is incompatible with the left-peripheral constructions shown in (1), thus generating a sentence as that in (2).

Predictions and further evidence: Speakers report that sentences as those in (1) give rise to a presupposition that marks the content of the embedded clause as part of the belief state of the matrix predicate's subject, what I call a [+conviction] pragmatic interpretation. Evidence for this interpretation is given in (4), which shows that a fragment as that in brackets cancelling this presupposition is pragmatically odd. On the other hand, for a sentence as that in (2), speakers report that no presupposition is detected, which entails a [-conviction] interpretation in our terms, and thus the fragment in brackets in (5) is pragmatically fine – cf. (4). Under the analysis I propose, these interpretation differences can be naturally explained. I argue that selection of Force° and *que1* "that1" correlates with a [+conviction] interpretation, while selection of Fin° and *que2* "that2" with a [-conviction] interpretation, which explains the noted interpretation differences between (4) and (5). In turn, the (un)availability of left-peripheral material easily follows, ultimately depending on whether Force° or Fin° is selected. Further evidence for the analysis I propose comes from German and from Asturian. Embedded clauses selected by assertive predicates in these languages also exhibit root phenomena, namely V2 and enclisis respectively – see (6) and (7). Assuming that V2 in German and enclisis in Asturian arise as a result of T°-to-Fin° movement, these data may be easily captured. *sagt* "she said" and *digo* "I say" may select Force° or Fin°. Selection of Force° is mapped as a zero-complementizer (in German) or a *que1* "that1" (in Asturian), and T°-to-Fin° can uniformly explain the V2 in German and the enclisis in Asturian (cf. (6a) and (7a)). If Fin° is selected, *daß* "that" and *que2* "that2" merged in Fin° block verb movement, which explains the verb-final and the proclisis in German and Asturian respectively (see (6b)

and (7b)). Finally, this analysis also predicts the interpretation differences between enclisis and proclisis in Asturian in (8), which ultimately depend on the selection of Forceº or of Finº.

Data

(1) a. Julio dice/cree   [que Ramón$_i$, todos confían   en él$_i$]   `HT = ✓`
      Julio say$_{3SG}$/believe$_{3SG}$ that Ramón all   trust$_{3PL-IND}$ in him
     *"Julio says/believes that Ramón$_i$, **everybody trusts** him$_i$"*
     b. Julio dice/cree   [que a María$_i$ la$_i$ dejó   Luis]   `LD = ✓`
       Julio say$_{3SG}$/believe$_{3SG}$ that to María her$_{CL}$ left$_{3SG-IND}$ Luis
     *"Julio **says/believes that María**$_i$, **Luis left her**$_i$"*
     c. Julio dice/cree   [que A MARÍA (y   no a Marta) dejó   Luis]   `Focus = ✓`
       Julio say$_{3SG}$/believe$_{3SG}$ that to María   and not to Marta   left$_{3SG-IND}$ Luis
     "Julio says/believes that it was María that Luis left (, and not Marta)"

(2) Julio dice/cree   [que la   dejó   Luis]
    Julio say$_{3SG}$/believe$_{3SG}$ that her$_{CL}$ left$_{3SG-IND}$ Luis
    "Julio says/believes that Luis left her"

(3) [$_{ForceP}$ *que1/that1* [$_{H\ TopicP}$ HTº [$_{Left-DislocatedP}$ LDº [$_{FocusP}$ Focº [$_{FinP}$ *que2/that2* [$_{TP}$ Tº …]]]]]]

(4) Julio dice/cree   que a María$_i$ la$_i$ dejó   Luis [, #pero no está seguro]
    Julio say$_{3SG}$/believe$_{3SG}$ that to María her$_{CL}$ left$_{3SG-IND}$ Luis   but not is   sure
     *"Julio says/believes that María$_i$, **Luis left her**$_i$, [**#but he is not sure** (whether that's true)]"*

(5) Julio dice/cree   que la   dejó   Luis [, pero no está seguro]
    Julio say$_{3SG}$/believe$_{3SG}$ that her$_{CL}$ left$_{3SG-IND}$ Luis
     *"Julio says/believes that Luis left her, [**but he is not** sure (whether that's true)]"*

(6) a. Sie sagte, sie wolle keine Bücher kaufen   German
      she said she wants no   books buy
     b. Sie sagte, daß sie keine Bücher kaufen wolle
      she said that she no   books buy   wants
     "She said (that) she didn't want to buy any books"

(7) a. Digo   qu'ayúdame   Asturian
      say$_{1SG}$ that-help$_{3SG}$-me$_{CL}$
     b. Digo que me   ayuda
      say$_{1SG}$ that me$_{CL}$ help$_{3SG}$ but not am sure
     "I say that s/he helps me"   [From Viejo (2008)]

(8) a. Digo   qu'ayúdame   [#,pero nun toi seguru]   [Forceº = *que1*]   Asturian
      say$_{1SG}$ that-help$_{3SG}$-me$_{CL}$ but not am sure
     b. Digo que me   ayuda [pero nun toi seguru]   [Finº = *que2*]
      say$_{1SG}$ that me$_{CL}$ help$_{3SG}$ but not am sure
     "I say that s/he helps me, but I'm not sure (whether that's true)"

References

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